This Prelude Appears only in the *5th Printing,* 1989
of
Spiritual Body & Celestial Earth
From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977

TOWARDS A CHART OF THE IMAGINAL
Prelude to the Second Edition of
CORPS SPIRITUEL ET TERRE CELESTE
de l'Iran Mazdeen a l'Iran Shi'ite

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It is a long time—and we shall say this again below—since western philosophy, let us call it "official philosophy," drawn along in the wake of the positive sciences, has admitted only two sources of Knowledge (*Connaitre*). There is sense perception which gives the data we call empirical. And there are the concepts of understanding (*entendement*), the world of the laws governing these empirical data. Certainly, Phenomenology has modified and overtaken this simplificatory epistemology (*gnoseologie*). Yet the fact remains that between the sense perceptions and the intuitions or categories of the intellect there has remained a void. That which ought to have taken its place between the two, and which in other times and places did occupy this intermediate space, that is to say the Active Imagination, has been left to the poets. The very thing that a rational and reasonable scientific philosophy cannot envisage is that this Active Imagination in man (one ought to say rather "agent imagination" in the way that medieval philosophy spoke of *"intellectus agens"*) should have its own noetic or cognitive function, that is to say it gives us access to a region and a reality of Being which without that function remains closed and forbidden to us. For such a science it was understood that the Imagination secretes nothing but the imaginary, that is, the unreal, the mythic, the marvellous, the fictive, etc.

On this account there remains no hope of recovering the reality *sui generis* of a suprasensible world which is neither the empirical world of the senses nor the abstract world of the intellect. It has furthermore for a long time now seemed to us radically impossible to rediscover the actual reality—we would say the *reality in act*— proper to the "Angelic World," a reality prescribed in Being itself, not in any way a myth dependent on socio-political or socio-economic infrastructures. It is impossible to penetrate, in the way in which one penetrates into a real world, into the universe of the Zoroastrian angelology of which the first chapter of this book describes certain aspects. We would say as much of the angeloph-anies of the Bible. For a long period I have been searching, like a young philosopher, for the key to this world as a real world, which is neither the sensible world nor the world of abstract concepts. It was in Iran itself that I had to find it, in the two ages of the spiritual world of Iran. This is why the two parts of this book are strictly binding on one another and interdependent. A contrast due essentially to the fact that their epistemology, foreign to this dualism, gives room, as for the necessary mediating power, for this agent Imagination which is imaginatrice. It is a cognitive power in its own right. Its mediating faculty is to make us able to know without any reservation that region of Being which, without this mediation, would remain forbidden ground, and

whose disappearance brings on a catastrophe of the Spirit, where we have by no means yet taken the measure of all the consequences. It is essentially a median and mediating power, in the same way that the universe to which it is regulated and to which it gives access, is a median and mediating universe, an intermediate world between the sensible and the intellectual *(intelligible*), an intermediate world without which articulation between sensible and intellectual (*intelligible*) is definitely blocked. And then pseudo-dilemmas pullulate in the shadows, every escape or resolution closed to them.

Neither the active nor the agent Imagination is thus in any sense an organ for the secretion of the imaginary, the unreal, the mythic, or the fictive. For this reason we absolutely had to find a term to differentiate radically the intermediate world of the Imagination, such as we find it presented to the minds of our Iranian metaphysicians, from the merely imaginary. The Latin language came to our assistance, and the expression *mundus imaginalis* is the literal equivalent of the Arabic *'alam al-mithal*, *al-alam al-mithali*, in French the "monde *imaginal*" a key-term over which we hesitated at the time of the first edition of this book. (The Latin terms have the advantage of fixing the thematic forms and guarding them from hazardous or arbitrary translations. We shall make plentiful use of them here.) In so far as it has not been named and specified, a world cannot rise into Being and Knowledge (*Connaitre*). This key-term, *mundus imaginalis*, commands the complete network of notions appropriate to the precise level of Being and Knowledge which it connotes: imaginative perception, imaginative knowledge, imaginative consciousness. While we encounter in other philosophies or systems a distrust of the Image, a degradation of all that properly belongs to the Imagination, the *mundus imaginalis* is its exaltation, because it is the link in whose absence the schema of the worlds is put out of joint.

Our authors tell us again and again that there are three worlds: 1. The pure intellectual world (*'alam 'aqli*), denoted in their theosophy as *Jabarut* or world of pure cherubic Intelligences. 2. The *imaginal* world (*'alam mithali*) known also in their theosophy as *Malakut*, the world of the Soul and of souls. 3. The sensible world (*'alam hissi)* which is the "domain" (*molk*) of material things. Correlatively the Forms of Being and Knowledge respectively proper to these three worlds are denoted technically as: 1. The Intellectual Forms (*sowar aqliya*). 2. The Imaginal Forms (*sowar mithaliya*). 3. The Sensible Forms (*sowar hissiya*), those which fall under sense perception. The French vocabulary to be found throughout this book is thus of a rigorous precision and "sticks" closely to the Arabic technical terms as also used constantly in Persian.

As for the function of the *mundus imaginalis* and the Imaginal Forms, it is defined by their median and mediating situation between the intellectual and sensible worlds. On the one hand it immaterialises the Sensible Forms, on the other it "imaginalises" the Intellectual Forms to which it gives shape and dimension. The *imaginal* world creates symbols on the one hand from the Sensible Forms, on the other from the Intellectual Forms. It is this median situation which imposes on the imaginative faculty a discipline which would be unthinkable where it had been degraded into "fantasy," secreting only the imaginary, the unreal, and capable of every kind of extravagance. Here there is the same total difference already recognised and clearly remarked by Paracelsus between the *imaginatio vera* (Imagination in the true sense) and "Phantasy."

In order that the former should not degenerate into the latter, precisely this discipline, which is inconceivable if the imaginative power, the active Imagination, is exiled from the scheme of Being and Knowledge, is required. Such a discipline would not be capable of involving the interest of an imagination reduced to the role of *folle du logis* or inspired fool, but it is inherent in a median and mediating faculty whose ambiguity consists of its being able to put itself at the service of that

Intellect whose supreme degree our philosophers denote as the *intellectus sanctus* (*'aql qodsi*), illuminated by the *intelligentia agens* (*'aql fa"al*) who is the Angel of the Holy Spirit. The seriousness of the role of the Imagination is stressed by our philosophers when they state that it can be "the Tree of Blessedness" or on the contrary "the Accursed Tree" of , which the Quran speaks,[1] that which means Angel or Demon in power. The imaginary can be innocuous; the *imaginal* never can be so.

One takes the decisive step in the metaphysic of the *imaginal* and the Imagination when one admits with Molla Sadra Shirazi that the imaginative power is a purely spiritual faculty independent of the physical organism and consequently surviving it. We shall see in the course of the texts translated here that it is the formative power of the subtle body or imaginal body (*jism mithali*), indeed this subtle body itself, forever inseparable from the soul, that is from the *moi-esprit*, from the spiritual individuality. It is thus as well to forget all that the Peripatetic philosophers or others have been able to say about it, when they speak of it as being like a bodily faculty and perishing with the organic body whose ordinance it follows.

The immateriality of the imaginative power was already fully affirmed by Ibn 'Arabi when he differentiated between the absolute imaginal Forms, that is to say such as subsist in the *Malakut*, and the "captive" imaginal Forms, that is, those immanent in the imaginative consciousness of man in this world. The former are in the world of the Soul (*âme*) or *Malakut*, epiphanies or theophanies, that is to say, *imaginal* manifestations of the pure Intellectual Forms of the *Jabarut*. The latter are in their turn manifestations of the imaginal Forms of the *Malakut* or world of the Soul to man's imaginative consciousness. It is therefore perfectly exact here to speak of metaphysical Images. Now these cannot be received unless by a spiritual organ. The solidarity and interdependence between the active Imagination defined as a spiritual faculty and the necessity of the *mundus imaginalis* as an intermediate world respond to the need of a conception which considers the worlds and the forms of Being as so many theophanies (*tajalliyat ilahiya*).

We thus find ourselves in the presence of a number of philosophers who refuse indifferently a philosophy or a theology which lacks the element of theophany. Sohravardi and all the *Ishraquiyun* who follow him have always considered the "Perfect Sage" as being the Sage who gathers to himself equally the highest philosophical knowledge and the mystical experience modelled on the visionary experience of the Prophet, the night of the *Miraj*. Now the organ of visions, of whatever degree they may be, whether in the case of the philosophers or of the prophets, is neither the intellect nor the fleshly eyes, but the fire of that *imaginatio vera* of which the Burning Bush is for Sohravardi the type. In the sensible form it is then the Imaginal Form itself which is from the very first and at one and the same time the pierceived form and the organ of visionary perception. The Theophanic Forms are in their essence Imaginal Forms.

This is to say that the *mundus imaginalis* is the place, and consequently the world, where not only the visions of the prophets, the visions of the mystics, the visionary events which each human soul traverses at the time of his *exitus* from this world, the events of the lesser Resurrection and of the Greater Resurrection "take place" and have their "place," but also the *gestes* of the mystical epics, the symbolic acts of all the rituals of initiation, liturgies in general with all their symbols, the "composition of the ground" in various methods of prayer (*oraison*), the spiritual filiations whose authenticity is not within the competence of documents and archives, and equally the esoteric process us of the Alchemical Work, in connection with which the First Imam of the Shi'ites was able

[1] *Zaqqum*. Quran, xvii, 60; xxxvii, 62-68; xliv, 43-46 ; lvi, 52 (N. of Tr.)

to say "Alchemy is the sister of Prophecy." Finally the "Biographies of Archangels" are by their nature imaginal history, since everything in them happens in the Malakut. Thus, if one deprives all this of its proper place which is the *mundus imaginalis*, and of its proper organ of perception which is the active Imagination, nothing of it has a "place" any more, and consequently no longer "takes place." It is no longer anything but imaginary and fictive.

With the loss of the *imaginatio vera* and of the *mundus imaginalis* nihilism and agnosticism begin. This is why we said a few lines above that we ought to forget here all that the Aristotelians and similar philosophers have said of the Imagination when they treat it as a bodily faculty. It is just this that makes the efforts of certain among the Jewish and Islamic philosophers to construct a philosophic theory of Prophecy pathetic. In truth, they do not extricate themselves from the difficulty. Either the prophet is assimilated to the philosopher or the philosopher does not know what to make of Prophecy. On the other hand the conjunction is effected without difficulty by those of our philosophers who were persuaded that their confreres, starting with the ancient Greek Sages as well as those of ancient Persia, derived their higher knowledge from the *Niche aux lumieres* of Prophecy (*Mishkazt al-nobowwat*). It is precisely here that Philosopher and Prophet unite in one single vocation.

The Prophet is not a diviner of future events but the spokesman of the invisible and of the Invisible Ones, and it is this that gives its sense to a "prophetic philosophy" (*hikmat nabawiya*). A prophetic philosophy is thus a "narrative philosophy.," absolved of the dilemma which obsesses those who ask: is it myth or is it history? In other words: is it real or is it unreal? Is it fiction or is it true? A prophetic philosophy is a liberation from this pseudo-dilemma. The events which it describes are neither myth nor history in the ordinary sense of the words. It is the history of the Malakut— what we shall call *imaginal history*—in the same way as the countries and the places of this history constitute an imaginal geography, that of the "celestial earth."

Access to this imaginal history is opened up for us by that hermeneutic par excellence which is denoted by the word *ta'wil*, which literally means to "reconduct something to its source," to its archetype, to its true reality. Twelve-Imam Shi'ites as well as Ismaili Shi'ites have excelled in this art, since *ta'wil* is at once the province and the incentive of their esotericism as the "seventh day" completing the six days of the Creation. To the straightforward exoteric reader what appears to be the true sense is the literal reading. What one proposes to him as the spiritual sense appears to him as the metaphoric sense, as "allegory" which he confuses with "symbol." For the esoteric it is the opposite: the so-called literal sense is only a metaphor (*majaz*). The true sense (*haqiqat*) is the event which this metaphor conceals.

Just as for the Kabbalists, true events are the eternal relations between the ten Sephiroth, concealed beneath the accounts of the exterior happenings related by the Bible, so for the Shi'ite esoterics two-thirds of the Quran are to be read in their hidden and true sense (*haqiqat*) as narration of the drama which is played out between the Holy Imams and their antagonists from before the creation of this world. This is not allegory: it consists of true events. Hegel said that philosophy consists in turning the world inside out. Let us say rather that this world is here and now inside out. The *ta'wil* and the prophetic philosophy consist in putting it right side out once more.

As the name of Hegel has just been uttered, now is the right moment in our preface to give the actual meaning of our leitmotifs for western philosophy. When the mystical theosophists represented in this book experience and affirm the necessity of the intermediate world, of an intermediary between the sensory and the intellectual, their position is exactly that of Jacob Boehme. Between the

intellectual and the sensible, or expressed more precisely still, between the transcendent and hidden Deity, the *Deitas abscondita*, and the world of man, Boehme places an intermediary which he calls the sacred Element, a "spiritual corporeity" which represents the Dwelling, the Divine Presence, for our world. This Dwelling is Wisdom itself, Sophia. This Presence js the Shekhina of the Kabbalists. It is the *imaginal* locus of an entirely spiritual incarnation, for all eternity anterior to that Incarnation which exoteric religion places in history, that history which for Shi'ites, theosophists and Ismailis is nothing but the metaphor of the True Reality.

Either way it is the idea of Theophany which is dominant, making itself evident by its own nature and of necessity between the intellectual and the sensible, and what is denoted as Sophia, as the "Soul of the World," is at the same time the *imaginal* locus and the organ of this Theophany. It is at once the necessary *mediatrix*, the *Deus revelatus*, between pure Divinity, for ever concealed, beyond our reach, and man's world. This is what we have in another place called the "paradox of monotheism" and it is a constant theme in all those doctrines in the "religions of the book" which are in one way or another related to the Kabbala. Equally in Jewish mysticism the Hassidim have established a triple differentiation: there is the unknowable God, there is the place of the emanation of the Glory, which is the "countenance on high" and which even the Angels do not know; lastly there is the manifested Glory, the "countenance beneath," the only one we can contemplate. This "countenance beneath" is the Angel Metatron as "Angel of the Countenance" who is equally the Presence, the Sophia, the Soul of the World.

Now every kind of dualism which has in one way or another come out of Cartesianism or which is closely related to it has rejected the necessity of just this spiritual mediating entity. Our western philosophy has been the theatre of what we may call the "battle for the Soul of the World." On the one hand, like "stainless knights" protecting this Soul, the Cambridge Platonists (Henry More, Ralph Cudworth); Jacob Boehme and his school with all those related to them; the "Boehmian" Newton; the Christian Kabbalists like F. C. Oetinger in whom currents of thought coming from Boehme and Swedenborg intersect. On the other, they find their antagonists: Descartes, Fr. Mersenne, Malebranche, Bayle, indubitably also Leibniz and Christian Wolff, and the list extends on down to our own days. Is it a matter of a battle that has finally been lost, the world having lost its soul, a defeat whose consequences weigh upon our modern visions of the world without compensation? If there has been a defeat, a defeat is still not a refutation. We know a certain number of young philosophers alive today who are deeply concerned with the wish to turn the scales once more in this struggle. This is why we spoke above of the actuality of the themes of this book; an actuality which ranges our "Platonists of Persia" at the side of the Cambridge Platonists.

The necessity for the *mundus imaginalis,* experienced and affirmed by our *Ishraquiyun*, is precisely the necessity for that mediation of which Jacob Boehme and his followers have just reminded us. More exactly still: this *mundus imaginalis*, world of Hurqalya, world of Malakut or world of Soul, is the "Celestial Earth" and the "Celestial Corporeity." Just as the Sophia I is otherwise: the *imaginal* place of the Divine Presence in our world, so the celestial Earth, present to the secret nostalgia in men's hearts, is typified in the Shi'ite gnosis by the person of Fatima the Resplendent, the daughter of the Prophet. Fatima is the Sophia.of the Shi'ite theosophy and cosmogony.

We will now introduce here the Shi'ite concept of the First Emanation (first theophany) of that Principle which is beyond every Name and every Attribute. This First Emanation is typified by the primordial Muhammadic Light (*Nur mohammedi*), constituted by certain figures of light, that is to say, the respective metaphysical entities known as the Fourteen Immaculate Ones. The eternal

succession of their births brings with it the birth of the worlds. Their Pleroma is the Dwelling, the necessary mediation between the transcendent God, concealed and inaccessible, and the world of men. The Fourteen Immaculate Ones are collectively "the Angel of the Countenance." A metaphysical narrative will show us in the course of this book, how the eternal person of Fatima-Sophia constitutes the Sophianity of the pleroma of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones, and how by the cosmogonic virtue of this pleroma, the Sophianity becomes the Presence in our world. Our authors coined a term to express this: *fatimiya*, an abstract noun which literally translated gives something like "*fatimianité*" but which the term Sophianity expresses more directly still once I we have recognised in the eternal mediating person of Fatima the Resplendent, Her who is elsewhere known as Sophia.

And the ancient Mazdean texts propose to us all the more of the Sophianity. Of the six Archangels who surround Ohrmazd, the God of Pure Light, from whom they emanate and whose name itself means "Lord Wisdom" (Ahura Mazda in the Avesta), three are masculine and three feminine. The first of these feminine Archangels bears in the Avesta the name Spenta Armaiti (in Pahlavi, that is in Middle Persian, Spandarmat; in Modern Persian, Sfandarmoz). The texts will show us the remarkable precedent inherent here. She is the "Daughter of Ohrmazd." She is indeed the Sophia of Mazdaism and the typification of Celestial Earth. Spandarmat-Sophia is the "Mistress of the Dwelling." She is the Dwelling itself, as feminine Archangel of the Earth which is Earth of Light. Building on her name in Pahlavi, the abstract term *spandarmatikih* has been formed which we cannot translate better than by the very term "Sophianity." This term denotes a certain mode of being prescribed for the Zoroastrian faithful. There is also an appeal, a striking correspondence, between the terms *fatimiya* and *spandarmatikih*, which both denote a "Sophianity" typified on the one hand in the person of the feminine Archangel holy Armaiti and on the other in that of Fatima-Sophia. To assume this Sophianity is for the human being to accede here and now to the Celestial Earth, to the world of Hurqalya, world of "celestial corporeity," which is that of the subtle Bodies of Light. Presented thus in a few lines, the intention of the subtitle of the book, "From Mazdean to Shi'ite Iran," will no doubt appear to the reader in more precise contours.

Obviously, the passage from one manifestation of Sophianity to another does not involve the material filiation of any historic causality because here plainly both manifestations are acts of the Malakut which occur in the imaginal world. We prefer to speak here of the epochs of a spiritual world rather than of constants or of recurring factors of the Iranian consciousness. Now the succession of the epochs of a spiritual world does not consist of a history which one can perceive and demonstrate in the way in which documents permit us to speak of the campaigns of Julius Caesar or of Napoleon. The epochs of the spiritual world are totally different from the epochs of the exterior world of geology or of sociopolitical history. The epochs of a spiritual world make up a history *sui generis*, which is in its very essence imaginal history. We are dealing here with a "history" of the same nature as that which is witnessed when our Shi'ite philosophers identify their Twelfth Imam now with the Saoshyant or Zoroastrian eschatological Saviour, now with the Paraclete announced in St. John's Gospel. We have already said that this history is neither myth nor history as understood in current parlance, but that it does not involve any the less a history of real events, or a reality proper to these events, a reality situated at a level other than that of the exterior events of the material world, which esoteric hermeneutic considers as being the metaphor of *true* events.

These true events together with the links which unite them one to another come to pass in the subtle world of the Soul, the world of Malakut, *mundus imaginalis*. Others have spoken of the "Chronicle of Akasha" (this term denoting the subtle world). What we have in view here postulates simply the term "imaginal history." Every philosophy which loses the sense of the imaginal world

closes to itself all access to the events of which it is the locus, and comes to be the prey of pseudo-dilemmas.

We therefore need a vocabulary other than that of history in the empirical sense of this word in order to deal with the "Chronicles of Malakut," just as Boehme needed a terminology different from that of the Peripatetic philosophers and expressed himself in the vocabulary of alchemy. To describe the link between the two ages respectively of Sophianity and of Celestial Earth, we have had recourse here to a musical terminology, and we turn to the sound effect produced on the organ by the playing of the *progressio harmonica*.

Penetration into the world of Hurqalya, into the Angelic World, thus becomes an aspect of the experience which the *progressio harmonica* offers to our hearing. And as we utter these words we again perceive certain consonances with "actuality" in the sense in which we spoke before of the actuality of the "battle for the soul of the world." Several important recent publications testify to the actuality of the Angelic World for and in the work of a number of philosophers in every age. The search for traces of this world even involves the feelings, not only by reason of the sarcasms which a defiant ignorance throws at it, but also because of all that this research is in duty bound to bring back painfully into the light. For it involves the whole of a forgotten tradition (indeed, deformed and altered out of recognition), whose multifarious texts alone can at once nourish research and lead to a complete renewal of angelology. Thus it has been our wish to present a few of these texts here. We do not pretend that mental habits that have been engrained for generations lessen the difficulty of access for our contemporaries into this world which for them is like a world long since lost.

All the more significant then has been the welcome given to a recent study which treats the "life after life" and presents the manifold testimonies of their actual experiences by people who, even though they had not crossed it never to return, had none the less really found themselves on the "threshold," for their deaths had already been clinically confirmed.[2] There is no reason to be surprised that such a book should meet with a moving approval from some, testifying to a nostalgia which nothing has ever succeeded in snuffing out in the human heart. Equally there is no reason for surprise if the same book has been received with scepticism. Certainly, many traditional texts were quoted in connection with the testimonies reported in this book. But how many people knew them? In fact, some of these testimonies cannot be entertained let alone understood except on the condition of having at one's immediate disposal an ontology of the *mundus imaginalis* and a metaphysic of the active Imagination as an organ inherent in the soul and regulated in its own right to the world of "subtle corporeity." We have made here an attempt at just this. Many more will be needed, necessitating rigorous study and exorcising every "fantasy" which could spoil the legitimacy of imaginative understanding.

In this connection, we wish to give a caution. We have come to see for ourself, with pleasure though not unmixed with some anxiety, that the word "*imaginal*" as used specifically in our researches has been spreading and even gaining ground. We wish to make the following statement. If this term is used to apply to anything other than the *mundus imaginalis* and the imaginal Forms as they are located in the schema of the worlds which necessitate them and legitimise them, there is a great danger that the term will be degraded and its meaning be lost. By the same token we would remind the reader that the schema in which the imaginal world is by its essence the intermediate world, and the articulation between the intellectual and the sensible, in which the active Imagination as *imaginatio*

[2] Dr. Raymond Moody, *Life after Life,* London, Corgi, 1977.

vera is an organ of understanding mediating between intellect and sense and as legitimate as these latter and that world itself. If one transfers its usage outside this precisely defined schema one sets out on a false trail and strays far from the intention which our Iranian philosophers have induced us to restore in our use of this word. It is superfluous to add—the reader will already have understood this—that the *mundus imaginalis* has nothing to do with what the fashion of our time calls "the civilisation of the image."

We concede that access to the world of Hurqalya, to the Angelic World, undoubtedly continues to be difficult. More than once since the publication of the first edition we have heard readers regretting the special difficulty of the first chapter—that on the angelology of the Avesta. We would like to suggest here— and this could apply to the whole of the book—that a single reading cannot be sufficient.

One does not penetrate into the Angelic World by housebreaking, one does not move around mentally in the world of Hurqalya by the assistance of a formal logic or of a dialectic which leads from one concept to the next by deduction. Passage from one imaginal Form to another does not obey any conceptual dialectic. The figures of the God-Angels of the Avesta, for example, overlapping one with another as they often do, can only be grasped by generating in oneself, on the indications of the texts, a minimum of mental vision. What then does this involve? One should resort here to the exemplary practice which Ibn 'Arabi himself has led us to design as the "theophanic method of discourse" (*oraison*).

It could be that this itself is nothing other than a form or an appeal of the *progressio harmonica*. But is it not frequent in the Bible for the Prophets to demand the assistance of a harp-player in order to open the eyes of their inner vision?

Translated by Peter Russell